

Hui Whanau not for everyone a Resounding Success

by Ned Haliburton

(Hui Whanau; literally: Family Gathering. The Author, now retired, has over 40 years experience as a journalist)

I enrolled for the Hui Whanau 1988 summer schools held at Greenmeadows, Hawkes Bay 3rd-10th January, this being the first of two seven-day courses. The Hui was extensively advertised in the Parishes but there was little indication from the accompanying literature as to what to expect. No syllabus was supplied then or at any other times.

The Hui was publicised as “a gathering of the Catholic family to dialogue for a bi-cultural future” which looked and sounded most inviting. I have underlined three words in the text which are the basis of comment below.

An additional factor is that those who went to the Hui were the recipients of some generous hospitality which makes it all the more difficult to write what I have to write.

A circular letter, sent to those who registered, outlined the programme for the first day and the Powhiri or Opening Ceremony; from which details it appeared that the St Joseph Maori Girls College was being turned into a Marae and the invited guests were to be billeted in school buildings adjacent to the College. On arrival we found we were residing in the College, in crowded but not uncomfortable circumstances, and, far from savouring the Marae lifestyle, we were to be subjected to an intense study programme.

Each day's work started with an optional “eucharist” at 7 a.m. and ended with supper at about 9.30 p.m. There were seven hours of study daily made up of four sessions—an exacting schedule for those long from school, and profitable, as it transpired, only to those who were prepared to submit themselves without reservation to a programme of

“inculturation”.

The programme’s discipline was described to me by Fr Jeff Drane, a young priest from Wellington, who claimed to be programme co-ordinator, as “structural analysis”. According to Rycroft, structural analysis or structural formulation is a psycho-therapy and motivation technique derived from the implanting of a series of concepts in the consciousness. It is worth noting that Freud, who denied all source of motivation except the erotic, called these concepts “fictions”.

Structural analysis at the Hui started thus: At 8.45 a.m. we were summoned to the school hall where, following morning prayers, a speaker held forth with what was called “input”. The harangue lasted about 30 minutes and usually included an attack on the values of the capitalist system and a description of the wrongs done by the Pakeha to the Maori.

Early criticism around the Hui reflected adversely on the persistent denigration of Pakeha cultural values as compared to Maori and, most curiously, the segregation of Maori and Polynesian students from all formal session of the Hui. One could only talk to the Maoris outside “school hours”. Several reasons were given to us by the organisers for this decision, none very convincing, making nonsense of the promise in the Hui’s advance literature “to dialogue for a bi-cultural future”. The dialogue, for which by now were substituted “input” and “feed-back”, was between Pakeha programmer and Pakeha programmed.

I talked to the Maoris and found them both sensible and sensitive and with a very different perception of their own situation, social, cultural and political, from the scenario being fed to us. They had no part in structural analysis which was reserved for the white middle-class liberals who comprised 90% of the Hui.

Marae protocol demands that everyone’s opinion be heard without interruption. Decisions are arrived at by consensus, no matter how long it may take. The Maoris and Polynesians would have found deeply repugnant the pressure-cooker style of indoctrination to which we Pakehas were subjected. I believe this was the real reason why they were kept apart from the groups.

After being subjected to input in the hall, we were divided into seventeen groups of about ten per group, dispensed to various classrooms. The groups were run by “facilitators”, mostly religious brothers and nuns. A couple of the more fortunate groups opted out in the glorious summer weather and cogitated under trees on spacious lawns. Formulated questions, arising out of input, were written up on posters to which we were enjoined to supply answers: “What does Pakeha culture mean to you?” “What does Maori culture mean to you?” “What do we mean by bi-culturism?”—this last question repeated in different forms over several sessions.

At first all answers were written up by the facilitators in the spaces provided on the posters. By day 3 (the second full day—the day of arrival being designated day 1) it became clear that the facilitators had been asked to be more selective in what they wrote. Non-approved answers were greeted with remarks like, “this is not what we want”, or more censoriously, “that is your opinion”. The facilitators were not discussion leaders but catechists. We were being taught by rote.

The facilitators all heralded from the same parent body: the National Commission for Evangelisation, Justice and Development.

Before the Hui, there was no mention of EJD running the show which they did rigidly. The strategy for the Hui was worked out by the EJD caucus some months before in a series of planning meetings held in Takapuna. It depended on establishing, without prior discussion, a series of pre-conceived ideas in the minds of the participants—structural analysis. As Fr Jeff Drane said, “The social injustice (between Pakeha and Maori) is too great and of too long standing to deal with reasonably. The settlers who grabbed Maori land never stopped to reason.”

EJD organisers also decided at Takapuna that anyone who did not willingly co-operate with the programme would be ignored and, if they persisted in their obduracy, they would be ostracised. This presupposed that the four hundred who attended both weeks of the Hui were neither reasonable people capable of rational judgement nor declared pro-Maori by fact of their being at the Hui in the middle of

the holidays when they could have been enjoying themselves elsewhere. EJD'S contempt for the human condition must have been enormous.

Even if some of the participants were thought to require a stronger brand of persuasion, it did not justify the suspension of normal learning processes of being allowed to ask questions, discuss and calmly deliberate the issues. It did not justify the use of a mind-bending technique originating in the psychiatric ward and currently in use in third world prison camps.

We were subjected at the Hui to the process of forcible conversion, reminiscent of the Holy Inquisition. (Strangely, nobody compared the programme to the auto-da-fe but several said it reminded them of Chinese Reconversion Camps).

After returning from Greenmeadows, my mind was so blocked and benumbed from resisting this psychological violence that I could not pray for four days.

Manuku Henare was Executive Officer of the EJD commission and titular chairman of the Hui, but the ringmaster was a Christchurch priest, Fr John Cumow, an ex-director of EJD. Sudden programme changes were announced accompanied with the remark: "John says..."

Fr Cumow did not like being called a Marxist: "Don't try to pigeonhole me" but his denunciations of capitalism had the apocalyptic fervour of a left-wing prophet of the 1930's and the same crude appeal. Who else would call the family "the last bastion of the capitalist system"?

Many present were shocked by the language of some priest instructors. Far from helping to set up a "dialogue for a bi-cultural future", the priests led the way in resisting any forward planning from the Hui. If the put down "this is not what we are discussing" was insufficient to quell initiatives, anyone who suggested it was time we stopped beating our breasts and started to think constructively about the future was liable to get a brutal snubbing or be held up to ridicule. A proposal from the floor for a new partnership agreement with the

Maoris, “to update the Treaty of Waitangi in terms of an industrial society” was derided as “Pakeha paternalism” and, at another time, as “neo-colonial bullshit”.

Another, questioning the need to sweep away the existing social order as a prerequisite to bi-cultural co-operation, was answered with: “This remark is typical of the white middle class outlook which has kept the Maoris enslaved for 150 years.” After being shown a provocative video on Bastion Point concluding with remarks from Fr Cumow that “it was time you white middle class Pakehas got down off the fence”, an interjector asked if it was not now time to talk about “doing something” only to be met with “Before you can do something, you must first know something and it’s clear from what you have just said that you know very little.”

In extenuation it should be said that Fr Cumow was old and tired. There was another priest at the Hui, equally abusive, who was neither.

The difficulty in attaining the state of knowledge demanded by Fr Cumow was inherent in a syllabus containing a great deal of very elementary information, imparted at a third form level, with everything written up on blackboards.

The writer believes he was one of the least knowledgeable present on the subject of Maoritanga and that everyone else knew at least as much as he did and some very much more, yet he learned almost nothing about Maori culture that he had not obtained from his own reading before arriving at the Hui.

The philosophy of the platform party—an amalgam of Trotskyism and gnosticism in the name of liberation theology—would have been more tolerable in some quarters had an alternative viewpoint been allowed. It was frustrating to be subjected to a barrage of dogmatic statements (on what after all is still a minority viewpoint in the Roman Catholic Church) under conditions which deprived one of all argument. As for an “alternative viewpoint”, this was handled by Fr Jeff Drane quite emphatically “The Hui has a bias which seeks to help people reach certain conclusions. There is no place here for an alternative viewpoint.” These “certain conclusions” were an aware-

ness of one's collective guilt as a Pakeha and a willingness to make penance by way of public confession.

In the final days, one after another was heard to confess their guilt as members of the white race and thank the Hui for making them feel "the pain and desolation" of being Maori.

In a reconciliation ceremony in the Chapel, people confessed their "social sins" (a category defined for their benefit by the Bishop of Palmerston North) "by being part of the justice system which sent 400 Maoris to prison last year" and similar expressions of guilt.

I was prepared to quit the Hui on day four to spare myself further aggravation but was persuaded by a Maori, Henry Wheoki, to remain. Henry was typical of the Maoris there—sensitive, deeply religious and a better communicator than any Pakeha I met. It was a great pity they were kept segregated. "Lay your treasure (koha) before the Hui," he said, "and see if the treasure is accepted. If they are sincere, they will accept it."

The test of my sincerity and theirs came in the last two days when a number of workshops were set up dealing with specific issues. After five days of tedious introspection, there seemed here at last a chance to achieve something positive. I enrolled, not unnaturally, in the workshop for media and communications. The facilitator was the ubiquitous Fr Drane. He proposed the theme of the workshop—the clearing of the channels of communication for any disadvantaged group which felt itself unfairly reported—and this was followed by a stimulating discussion lasting the entire first session. Part of the session was televised by Seven Seas TV with fateful consequences.

We met again in the evening for the second of what should have been four sessions. Fr Drane wanted to cancel it, saying he could do with a free period. He was persuaded not to cancel as the PR of the Hamilton Diocese, Judith Evans, wanted the group to help her with her report.

About 45 minutes into the second session Fr Drane began to appear very agitated. Suddenly, speaking in the most abrupt way, he said the workshop on the media was to be terminated. There would be no

further talk of “media watch”—which occupied the first session but not the second—as “this was not what we were supposed to be discussing”.

I was told later that something of the same happened to the workshop on education where someone from the Education Department not an EJD member but like myself a guest, over-enthused his group with some of his own ideas.

The censoring of discussion in the workshops when, as one group member said, “people showed signs of not towing the party line” revealed to the last the iron grip EJD was determined to keep on the Hui. The thought police were staying on till the bitter end.

Conclusion

The suppression of the workshop on the media was for the writer the final turn of the knife, the nadir of a week of frustration and disappointment. To an old-time Liberal, it seemed an unnecessary exercise in intolerance. In a written evaluation, left at the Hui’s office on departure I said so.

The EJD caucus insulted the intelligence of the many attractive and interesting people who came from all parts of the country to learn something and, if possible, to do something in the present critical situation of racial tension.

However, I expect this view will be supported by a small minority only—the five to ten percent who were unbrainwashable. Of the many who were critical at the time of the way we were treated, most will have by now, I believe, have inclined to the natural desire to review the Hui in the best possible light “in the interest of Catholic unity”.

There remain two gaping questions, never openly asked at the Hui but requiring answers if the costly experiment is to appear credible, even on its own terms.

The first concerns EJD which organized the Hui down to the last syllable of uttered thought. How national is a body calling itself “National commission”? How representative is EJD of New Zealand Catholic opinion?

The presence at Greenmeadows of two Bishops and a Cardinal gave to the Hui an impressive imprimatur. Does EJD speak for the Bishops?

The other question lies in the term "bi-culturism". On day two where we were told very emphatically by Manuku Henare that we must stop referring to New Zealand as multi-cultural as the only options lay between the tangata whenua, meaning people of the land, the original inhabitants who must be acknowledged as the sole landowners of Aotearoa-New Zealand; and the manuhiri or "flock of birds" who are dependent on the goodwill and hospitality of the tangata whenua.

Because of the Hui's format, this startling piece of information was non-debatable. It was not willingly accepted and was queried by most of the Maoris and all the Polynesians to whom I spoke as well as a few white dissidents.

The Maoris said that far too much emphasis was being laid on what divides us. The Polynesians saw themselves as being downgraded into a sub-group of the majority group of aliens or flock of birds in the country of their adoption. Both for obvious reasons preferred a multi-cultural future and said so.



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